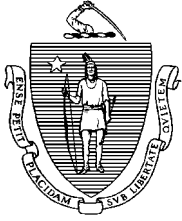


SENATE, NO. 2462

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts



IN THE YEAR OF TWO THOUSAND AND SEVEN

AN ACT TO IMPROVE DROPOUT PREVENTION AND REPORTING OF GRADUATION RATES

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled,
And by the authority of the same, as follows:*

- 1 SECTION 1. Chapter 76 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 1A
- 2 the following section:-
- 3 Section 1B:
- 4 (a) The General Court finds it necessary to reinforce the Commonwealth's commitment to the
- 5 National Governor's Association "Graduation Counts Compact," which seeks to improve
- 6 collection, analysis, and dissemination of graduation and dropout data and create a nationwide
- 7 common, accurate graduation rate.
- 8 Further, the General Court finds that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts shall be committed
- 9 to maintaining a data and public reporting system that accurately accounts for all students when
- 10 calculating high school graduation rates, and informs the public of progress toward the goal of
- 11 increasing high school graduation rates.

12 The General Court finds high-quality data collection and reporting to be accurate, transparent,
13 uniform (both within districts and statewide) and accessible to many different populations.
14 Further, the General Court acknowledges the efforts of the Department of Education to calculate
15 accurate graduation rates, in accordance with the NGA's Grant, and the release of the statewide
16 graduation rate in February 2007.

17 The General Court further finds that increased coordination and collaboration among
18 community-based organizations, school districts, businesses, higher education institutions, the
19 juvenile justice system, community leaders, parents, and students are necessary to help lower
20 the dropout rate and to increase efforts to help those who drop out re-enroll in education
21 programs.

22 The General Court seeks to further understand the connection between school discipline policies
23 and students' level of engagement or alienation from school, with strong consideration being
24 paid to court-involved youth.

25 The General Court recognizes that dropout recovery should be the joint responsibility of school
26 districts and local workforce investment boards (WIB) through their Youth Councils. Youth
27 Councils may elicit feedback from local Pathways to Success by 21 (P21) teams. Recovery
28 strategies shall include outreach referral to local school districts and alternative education
29 programs. Collaborative efforts shall allow business and community partners to work with
30 school districts to conduct outreach and referral, and to inform future dropout prevention and
31 recovery strategies.

32 The General Court also recognizes that the consequences of leaving school early and failing to
33 attain a diploma are severe and lasting – for those who drop out and society as a whole - and
34 thereby seeks to reduce the statewide annual dropout rate by 50% by the year 2012, unless the

35 Graduation and Dropout Commission establishes a different goal and timeline within one year
36 of enactment of this legislation.

37 (b) All public school districts throughout the Commonwealth shall be provided with tools for
38 accurate reporting of high school graduation and dropout data. These data will aid in the
39 Department of Education's implementation of a longitudinal data collection system and its
40 reporting of graduation rates, including but not limited to a 4-year graduation rate, 5-year
41 graduation rate, and adjusted graduation rates. These data shall be disaggregated in the
42 following categories: limited English proficiency, low-income, special education, race/ethnicity
43 and gender. Data shall be coded within the Student Information Management System (SIMS) to
44 reflect various withdrawal designations.

45 (c) The Graduation and Dropout Commission shall be established to study dropout prevention
46 and dropout recovery programs and strategies implemented throughout the Commonwealth.
47 The Commission will be comprised of members of the Department of Education, Department of
48 Workforce Development, Board of Higher Education, Department of Social Services,
49 Department of Youth Services, Department of Transitional Assistance, Department of Public
50 Health, Department of Mental Health, Committee on Public Counsel Services, Commonwealth
51 Corporation, Massachusetts Advisory Committee on Education Policy, as well as business and
52 community leaders. The Commission shall also make recommendations with regard to the
53 following:

- 54 (1) raising the compulsory attendance age from 16 years of age to 18 years of age,
55 (2) expanding the definitions of "Structured Learning Time" to include internships and
56 work-study programs,

(3) developing a reimbursement mechanism for districts sending students to alternative education program,

(4) providing financial incentives for districts that are effective in graduating at-risk students and recovering high school dropouts,

(5) other funding that may be necessary to implement dropout prevention and recovery programs statewide.

(d) The Department of Education shall be provided with funds to hire additional analysts dedicated to collection and comprehensive analysis of graduation and dropout data. The analyses conducted by the Department will inform future policies to prevent dropouts and improve college readiness.

(e) Every school district with an annual dropout rate greater than 5% shall develop a district-wide action plan designed to reduce dropout rates and effectively track students. Action plans shall be submitted to the Department of Education and shall include an outreach and referral strategy as well as a comprehensive listing of alternative education options and other pathways to earn a diploma offered within the public school system. Districts shall work with teams of community stakeholders, including but not limited to workforce investment boards through their Youth Councils and Pathways to Success by 21 (P21) Teams, to develop a comprehensive approach to address the dropout issue. The comprehensive approach shall include the districts offering alternative options that enable students who have dropped out to return and receive a full high school diploma. Such options may be delivered directly by the public school district, or by non-profits approved by the public schools. The Department shall provide each district with technical assistance to assist in the development of the plans and enhance the districts'

79 ability to meet the diverse needs of its student population. Technical assistance should include
80 several research-based alternative options and strategies.

81 (f) There shall be a “Dropout Prevention and Recovery Grant Program,” hereinafter referred to
82 as “The Program.” The program shall be administered by the department and shall have the
83 following purposes:

84 (1) To provide districts with funds to implement in-district “early indicator systems”
85 using strong indicators of dropping out to identify students unlikely to graduate on-time from
86 high school without receiving school-based support.

87 (2) To create capacity within regions, through local workforce investment boards, for
88 outreach to dropouts and referral to local school districts and alternative education programs.

89 (3) To provide funds to programs statewide that offer “alternative routes” to a diploma
90 that meet the needs to those returning to education. Funds shall be awarded to programs that
91 demonstrate coordination and collaboration among the following entities: school districts,
92 community-based organizations, workforce investment boards, Youth Councils, higher
93 education institutions, alternative education programs, and employers.